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BROKEN SHADE

POEMS

BY

JOHN HELSTON

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To
MAURICE REED,
dead in the war,
this book is inscribed in remembrance
by the Author

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ÆGEAN

I dreamed of the great dawns that woke
The marble from the mine
Into the white Greek women
Of groves—among the pine
And ilex dark, the sea-fogs cloak,
That drip Ægean brine.

The sea mist and the sunlight stood
Together on the sea
Where phantom yet the argosies
At long lost anchors be
Now sun and silence haunt my blood
From behind Thessaly.

THE MAMMON

I saw, where woodland trees and skies were dark
In green and blue—as when July is here,
And time to dream of naiads lying stark
With drowsy limbs and reed-pipes fluting near
With music of the noon-tide of the year—
In brimming shade a god of alien stone
The deep heart of the thickets beat upon.

Even so I saw him in the clutch of shade
While one still ray of sunlight searched his hand.
I know not from what city he had strayed . . .
May all his like be missing from the land.

A UNITY

I, who have heard Orion splash on the midnight hills,—
Who have been at veiled births of beauty by stark
 moonlight,—
Who have watched how the heart of eve grows quiet
 on misty fells,—
How loudly there comes from far a whiteness about
 the plover,
Trailing on slow strange wings her cry on the day and
 night,—
How darkly the pale air shrieks round the swoop of
 the dark windhover,—
I have known that colour and sound as a wave unite,
Far in the ends of sense, where the spirit wells.

TIME—AT THE BIRTH OF MAN

HERE in the shadow of my labour stands
The memory of things I wrought—
The forms uncouth that peopled early lands :
The jungles in the shadow of my thought
Still move : and still with flanks asteam,
With limbs asprawl and dull of mind,
The brutes that made morasses quake and teem
Come forth once more and voice an ancient world ;
Where fiery mists and all their vanished kind
Of glowing damps about the forest curled,
And night herself was lit with ghosts of change,
And from those still peaks yonder there were hurled
The red-hot bowels of the mountain range.

So for the past ! Such memories waken near,
Beside these mountains in a shaken gloom
Of thunder, while the leagues of forest loom
Far out beneath the lightning . . . Near or here,
I know not if new change be in the dusk
Of this grim day ; but ere the wind fell dead
Upon that marsh, I saw a lifted tusk
Gleam, and a mammoth trumpeting with fear—
With fear or rage—who, from the forest boughs,
Screamed through the swamp at foes the dark air, nigh
That reeking pool, held for him . . . What could
rouse

Him so ?—the place was empty as the sky
Is now of wings . . . And then he wheeled and fled
Back to his lair a mile beyond the marge
Of those gloomed trees : I heard his flying fade
In the dense wood—in footprints of his charge
The water sucking at the air, *afraid !*

PAGAN

A brightness stirs by the water's edge,
As beautiful as the feet of Spring
By the willowed pool with its banks of ling
When west winds rule at its whispering.

A darkness whirrs from a cove of sedge.

Ere one can cry, "What means the thing?"
A crow and a sea-gull strive in flight
As they wheel together to left and right. . . .

But if your soul, from dark or shine,
Turn but to grey,
A ghost that's in your spine
Shall take away
Your sins and Springs,—
Ay, cut your wings
For good and evil in that day.

TROTH-PLIGHT

THE birds last night in the darkness flying
Across the fern and crying, crying
Teu whit ! teu whoo ! teu whit ! teu whoo !
—The noisy owls as little knew
Or cared what we went there to do
As the quiet winds about us sighing.

And now the day is here ; and none
Is like to see us save the sun.
Come on, my love, the hills are clear.
My lovely one, my bonny dear !
If but the troth we kept hold true,—
Ay, when last night's great stars are blown
In dust before the lords of breath
On their last gust and dying groan
That herald universal death,
We still may hear, as did those two,
Teu whit ! teu whoo ! teu whit ! teu whoo !

I'll love when last night's stars are dead,
And all that beauty overhead
Is out of mind, is out of sight,—
When yonder sun no more shall tan
The face of any girl or man,
Or set great nature's bonds alight
Who knows ? the troth we kept last night
May yet outlive each witness bright—
Old Sirius—Aldebaran !

A BRIDAL SONG

MY company is of the stars,
The darkness and the dew :
Upon the hills and chines and scars
 To-night the moon is new—
As in the years gone by, when I walked here with you.

The tide, its trouble and desire,
 Is even as we heard
That night upon the cliffs expire :
 To-night the wind has stirred
The dingle as when we listened there without a word.

Below the press of night, below
 The sound of tide or tree,
Our sundered natures strive to go
 Together secretly—
Here to beget a ghostly child of memory.

ALIENS

WHEN midsummer had spoken you
In whispers, of her power ;
And one high cloud of thunder, through
The voices of a shower,—

I watched you tread the still wood's grass,
Smiling as in a sleep
Where hueless dreams arise and pass
To rainbows at a leap.

“ Seek in dreams ;” said I, aloud,
“ Some women would have sought to find
The fire sprung out of yonder cloud
Gathered up in my heart and mind.”

STARRYHURST

WHEN we hear the pine wood tell
Tales of heaven and of hell
Over lovers that are gone
Beyond the moonlight and the moon,
Our two hearts recite their beat
Like a song with fate in it
That men have heard come from a wood
In some haunted neighbourhood.

And the pale owl gliding by
The starry heights up in the sky
Fans their silence with his wing :
We have heard their silence sing
How the meteor flames expire,
Burst their flying hearts of fire—
As things long pent that find them free
On heaven's blue hill of ecstasy.

WRAYTON THORN

THERE is a gate—the gate is white.
I'd find it—darker than to-night

My mother cried upon me : “ *Shame !*
There's him would give you a honest name,
You'd scorn for him as will deceive !”

I said, I'd see the heavens heave
Their stars all over Smithy's plot
'Fore I'd leave go the love I got
Through kissing-back in Wrayton Thorn.

“ *You'll rue the day as you were born !* ”

But crying “ My dear ! ” just like a man,
Thorn ran to meet me ; and I ran
To see God walking in the trees
And my man there upon his knees
And lifting up his burning eyes

Then God went back into the skies.
I heard the heavens close at ten
By Wrayton clock across the fen.

IN SOLWAY-SIDE

I'M awaey to my ain lad luvver—
Back yon i' th' moss behind,
Where th' peat is crossed
By th' last curlew's call an' th' breath o' stars,
An' a passion is cum upon it fra' Solway scars
As th' tide runs whisperin' over till sounds is lost,
An' night like a dreamfu' woman her breast unbars.

CUCKOO SONG

BEFORE me through an April rain
A hillside echo goes—
Is caught in a net
Of young leaves wet,
And now is off again
I would these days were those
When I for love was out
In greenwoods with my man,
And yonder bird
Were him we heard—
Shout ! cloudy cuckoo, shout !
You wily African.

WHITE OR GOLD ?

THE time was when in towns
Laburnums carry
A golden fleece.

We went by woodways towards the down
Love-laden, very,—
Anxious for ease.

A broad robinia tree .
Its blossom snows
On the path in June—
A hidden path where I and he
Through a leafy close
Hid from the noon.

Of petals white or gold,
Which would you choose
(White in your path) ?
Which—if one cloud of thunder rolled,
Then silence, the blue's
Heat without wrath ?

THE WOODWAY

SONG

THERE'S a woodway said to be
Where a rainbow tints a tree
And a bird sings suddenly
In a land behind a hill.

There at noon-day falls a gleam
Through the shadows on a stream
When the Pan god pipes adream
With the breath of summer fill.

There a woodman strange and wild,
By Orion star-beguiled
In a valley as a child,
Watches in that valley still.

Andante



rall. e dim.

NIGHT-THROES

IN peaceful oceans of the dew
The island juniper
Stand up and watch the night renew
Her starry hemisphere.

*" I'm in the berried bush, my love,
Where night is on the down.
I would the dews might rise above
My heart—and passion drown ! "*

She heard the night wind leave the hill
A long dark league away.
A withered fen became her will,
Her womb a pit of clay.

AN EXILE

ALL night the bentgrass and the weeds
Move secretly in undertones.
A falling water tells of loss
In darkness on the stones.
And like a phantom of old deeds,
There is a ghost upon the moss.

I seek the rowans' wintry shade :
The fell-side branches from the sky
Are not more distant than my arms
From her for whom they die.
And withered as the weed and blade
A long dead starlight sets and swarms.

SUBCONSCIOUS

A windy shadow on the down,
The beech wood is for her a tomb ;
Nor shall our sin be ever known—
My likeness fades from out her womb
Beneath the soil and the beech leaves brown

“Awake, my husband ! Awake, beloved !
All night I have listened while you slept
Amid wild trees, for years, that moved
And mocked you when their leaves were stripped !”

“I ? No ! My God ! For I have lain
All night with secrets in my brain
The fiend himself for fear had kept !”

A RETROSPECT

FAR twilights, where as soft as rain
The aspens whisper and are still,
I would I trod your dusks again
And solitary as the hill.

But now a City shares my life
With some sleuth lust naught can appease,
And I have taken a whore to wife,
And no lee light comes o'er the trees.

THE SEEKERS

(i)

THEY came to that land from the north,
By the old road now thronged with grass
And hawk'sbit flowers like graven brass
And knapweeds dark that love wild earth

Where the old road fades out in ling,
In purple heath, in gorse of gold,
Where whinchats talk and kestrels wing
Even now as ere the way grew old,
And where all else that might be told
Is lost beneath the wilding stealth
Of gorse and grass and ling and years
And all that gives wild hills their wealth
Of secrets for the winds' wild ears,
—Though for no man's those secrets are—
There stand. And through the darkest day,
Southwards that water far away
Gleams ; and its gleam is wild as far

*They knew their quest was strange as that strange dew
Before the starless night came on ;
And the dim water's gleam was old, they knew.
In the morning they slept strangely in the sun.*

(ii)

They came to that land from the south
Miles deep, a woodland, oak and ash,—
Where thewed like time or lithe as youth

Stray beeches tower and take the lash
Of storms upon them, laughing high
Through wilder laughters from the sky,
Or woosers of the lightning flash,
Stiffen, and shriek of death, and die,—
Miles deep, a woodland haunts the ways.
Men lost there sicken, rumour says.

The undergrowths are strangely dark ;
Strange scents and sounds are in the earth ;
There midnight hears the dog-fox bark,
The vixen scream, and that eerie birth—
Night-pregnant cries come forth for death
While cries as wild come hot for love :
The hazels whisper 'neath their breath,
The brambles and the brackens move.

And northward of those woods, the mere
Lies with its waters hid. A rise
Of ground begins at the woods there.
The golden broom-flowers fill one's eyes
In June on all that rising ground.
Slow streams there are, without a sound
Spread secretly through grass and rush
In that long, marshy, golden hill,
Past myrtles wild—the sweet-gale bush,
Past roots that keep the water still
In pools whose mirrored heavens hold
The starry Spring's marsh marigold

*They heard all night the stealth of woodland things
Hunting. They saw, when day was near,
Long slopes in flower and the grass lit with springs.
They said: " This day we look to find the mere."*

They came to that land from the east
 A cleft there is high in the hill
 That crouches there like some great beast
 Above a hollow place grown still
 For its vast presence. And the cleft
 Is scented over from height to height
 With thyme that breathes the sun, the dew—
 The downland scent of day-and-night.
 Though nought save memory is left
 Of light or dark 'mid chalk and yew
 And the great slopes so still by day,
 Dreaming, wind-lulled, where gods renew
 Their freshness, slopes that steal away
 By night beneath the stars and cloud
 To some far tryst of their giant kind—
 The downland scent returns, remains,
 Whilst hills look out upon the plains,
 When memory's voice fades in its shroud,
 When even memory goes blind.

Look westward from that down—the last
 Of all its chalky range—below,
 There lie some miles of sand, a waste
 Where many pines and birches grow.
 And wide the fern is rippled there
 When summer wind goes through the trees ;
 Deep in those brackens to their knees
 Stand rocky shapes like men who bear
 An ancient burden from the seas,
 While clouds above their voiceless waves
 Sweep and the sunlight leaves the sand
 Which gleams about that hollow land,—
 Ay, shadow there like a sea behaves.

And there the day's end, like a sign
Of stealth to tides whose wave it fills,
Ebbs westward through the birch and pine—
Robbed of their shadows by the hills
That haunt the sunset's border line.
Sometimes, 'twixt sundown and the dark,
A mist floats up from off the mere ;
And from its silence dusk distils
A spirit of hidden waters there,
Far off, vague, beautiful, and stark

*They lay like shadows all a summer's day
'Neath a lone yew tree on the down.
The lands below them rose and fell away
Like dreams in sleep or faces when they drown.*

(iv)

They came to that land from the west
The hills are rough ; the woods are high—
And one of firs is on the crest,
Wherein, 'tis said, that dead men lie.
And some have heard their battle cry,
And some have found a broken spear
Whose head was green as mosses are,
A skull, and weariness and fear,
In that place of forgotten war ;
Where, hearkening the fir-wood's sigh,
Are caves and mounds and trees decayed
Where they have fallen in a gloom
Whose shadows make the mind afraid
At midday—having within their womb
The endless and the unallayed.

From those dark hills the mere receives
The last rays of the setting sun
Across a mile of aspen leaves
That whisper all their days, till one
Of autumn breath comes there and lays
Their voice to rest where they are sown
In dim fen waters and winding ways
Where the shrill-mourning reeds intone
Long requiems. . . . A house of stone
Stands in the aspen tract alone.
Its mill-wheel rots : its roof is riven :
Rank weeds look through its broken panes :
To bats and owls the place is given.
A hundred years the storms and rains
Have searched there, and the suns and frosts
In silence. For its title deeds,
No man disturbs among the weeds
The squatting toad, the rusty chains,—
None the grey poplars' talk with ghosts

*They saw the ruin aspen-veiled ; passed by.
Said one : " Of old, we knew that place.
A mere lies close, where the wild herons fly
And no man twice peers in to see his face."*

STORM

THE fell-water comes with a cry.
Skiddaw's ghostly bulk is loud—
Streaming, shaken in a cloud,
His shoulders bear the thunder-sky.
And underneath his starless height
A stricken pine-tree shrieks and falls
Faces—faces hurrying, white,
Come and go where the water calls
To feats of elemental night
Along Blencathra's mountain walls.

O crying water men may hark !
The madness of the storm is known ;
The lightning to the world is stark.
But on my heart there is fallen a stone
Out of the heavens in the dark.

SENTINELS

GREY the day above Birdoswald ;
The wind comes to the Wall
As from northward moors in motion—
Heather seething in the fall.

Where the Roman's spear was grounded,
No more the sentry stands,
Midway 'twixt his strong "mile castles,"
Time upon his hands.

Midway 'twixt the strong "mile castles,"
In the still fosse I lie,
With a thistle's spear above me
Pointing at the sky.

CROGLIN WATER

CROGLIN Water, O wild Croglin Water !—
Bonny from the peat and brown
As the light on the basking otter
In warm brackens lower down.

Like your linns that shout and blend their voices
On the rock they carve and spray,
Steals an echo heavy with all time's noises
Through the gorge of life away.

And beyond the gorge, the wider river
Shouts an answer and then is still
Praising the gift—that men may praise the giver—
O Croglin Water through the hill ?

For I know no answer, though the torrent
Of my living leaps and swells
But there rise in quiet places of its current
Bubbles like an otter's bells.

PAN MET WITH

THE clouds hold their high mysteries
To-day on every hill.
By Wetheral the windy trees
Hide flutes of shade
Where noon has played
All its dense notes at will.

Where Eden river's gorges wind
The water hymns a god.
And there 'mid strange ways of the mind
The goat-foot falls,
The blown pipe calls,
Through listening underwood.

IN MARSHALLS LONNING

AT evening when the dusks begin
To bring forth stars and use the trees
With twilight stealth and, close to men,
On earth beget the mysteries,

The beetle in the lonning tells
To me how a Pictish arrow drones,—
The owlet cries across the fells
How Roman soldiers hide their bones.

THE HEALERS

BY down and weald, by weald and down,
That saw the British tiger pass
And the last mammoth's dying swoon
Spread stillness through the shaken grass,
Dwells beauty which outlives them
By some sweet power of days
Those lands breathe while it gives them
Sunrise, and evening rays,
And nights of calm, and noon that plays
Like fountained fire
In its desire
On heaths and on their ancient ways
Like fountained fire,—
By weald and down, by down and weald,
I have heard men cry their souls were healed.

A CHURCHYARD

QUAINT pictures of the sun in power
And insurrections of the stone
The lichens dwelling on the tower
Have wrought for thrice a hundred years,
Where silently a sign appears—
A creeping shadow of the hour,
Appears, and then is gone

Quietly as from the dial up yon
The clouds depose time's darkened ray,
Pale folk come in a cloud of thought—
The folk for whom time's ways are nought,
And with great eyes that answer none,
Pass me, and steal away.

NIGHT SHIFT

THE oast cowl cools its steadfast ear
Among the stars . . . The fern owl spins
His one note among the whins
And the moth-wings flying near

The dark cone stands there, breathing high
O'er the hopfield's shadowy rows
Into the west Orion goes
Farmer has his hops to dry.

THE DOWNS BEYOND

SEE now, the voiceless moon,
With yet enough of breath to fill
Man's heart as with a boon
Of valleyed peace and hill,—

It rises ; and the quiet yews
Breathe softly as the great rays pass
Across the downs' peace of the dews
That shows for miles upon the grass.

MIRAGE ?

THE year has burnt the hillsides brown.
The hot air goes beneath the trees
And takes the life of flowers
And drinks the wild-brooks to their lees
That once were bright beneath the down.

A borstall climbs upon the chalk
To livid east and livid west :
Even ere his midday hours
The sun the whole sky has oppressed
For all that lie on earth or walk.

An elm shrieks out and throws a limb
On fly-stung cattle mute below.
And now an iron bell
Clangs from the hillside . . . Two men throw
Earth from their spades . . . I hearkened him

Who left off first to drink. "*Ay, haard
She wur, I hev heerd say, as this.*"
(He struck the flints, to tell
How hard she was) "*Ther's none to miss
This un what's gaan to meet th' Laard !*"

"*Er's done wi'out us foak that long—
Paarson, ee says, twur noaat but pride,
Since 'er man left 'er lone.*"
A furlong up the harsh hillside,
I knew the grave-man's talk was wrong.

A man lay in the juniper.
His eyes were not as man's may be.
A darkness in its bone
His face had while it sullenly
Watched where it saw them bury her.

Some bugloss banners, faint with heat,
Some yellow bedstraws, bleached and dry,
Were 'twixt us as I passed—
Going up toward that livid sky
That seemed as leaden as my feet.

A gap between tall dogwoods twain
Showed me the thing the borstall hedge
Went on with me at last
I dropped upon a barrow's ridge
When those loud heart-beats left my brain,

I knew what he, alive below,
Had done to her none came to weep,
For whom was such desire
As shut the sun out from her sleep :
I know not how I came to know.

But I crept to the edge to stare
Down the burnt grass where that still bush
Swam in the foothills' fire.
I could have cried to God, to crush
The hill, because the man was there.

I could not see him, yet could see
None else—save her laid underground.
My brain a burning wire
Touched, and I heard her silence sound
The long years of his cruelty.

" *Paarson, ee says, twur noaat but pride !* "

I have seen things that hide their hurt,
 Seen those that fear the dark :
And she on whom they flung the dirt
Had strength to bury love that died.

But that foul thing that lit love's tomb
 With yonder eyes, it haunted her
 Even when she heard the lark
 Down there among the juniper,
Maybe the man had guessed his doom—

I saw the hot air, like a glass,
 Reflect some hidden frenzy there.
 And when I went to mark
 The place—'twas though as in a lair
Some beast had beaten down the grass.

THE WHITE POPLARS

SWIFT beauty climbs the engine steam, and shows
Haunts of hushed nightingales to flying sound
And the incurious light upon the train,
And then as swiftly goes ;
And darkness throbs upon the shaken ground ;
The leaves with whispers settle to repose ;
And the clear singing comes to life again

But on the midnight lingering still
The lifted leaves' last gestures pale divide
The darkness from the echoes on the hill,
And woo a man with their ghostly will
From the dark banks of suicide.

“ LONG DOG ” WILL

SLICK-EYED William ! “ Long dog ” Will !
A gate of stars has the gap in the hedge
On Martyr’s High—the shadowy hill
That knows the night from edge to edge
And whispers now, and now is still.

You and your mate you taught to turn
In her own shadow’s length almost
When the moon was high above the fern,
And hide where scarce could hide a ghost—
The two of you are gone, I learn ?

Yet, Will, I thought I saw her now,
Full chase—her speed smoke through the stars
That gate the hedge-gap on the brow
And I remembered her brindle’s bars
And colours like an autumn bough.

And I remembered her eyes of fire :
Her brain looked through them like a fiend.
I guess you found your heart’s desire
That day you brought her home, just weaned.
I met the two of you, down White Mire

None hurt her, times you were in gaol,
Save where they hid you, she could not find.
The Oaksteads farmer tells the tale :—
He shot her in the dyke behind.
But you were dead on Paschendaele.

JAAHN

JAAHN runned an' leaped wi' joy, ee did !
Ee wur a gammock one to leap
An' beat 'em aall at games. Then bloody Ned—
By Diial Post—grown jallus, devil's brat !
Laid trap for en ! A-dreamed it in 'is sleep,
Ee sayed That's how it comed to *that*.

Yaan gaarse ower yaander, whur my hand
Do piint—a miile fraam Maartyr's heer—
That's whur that Satan's sand-pit be, th' sand
They lads 'd juump in aan thur springy vet.
An' Ned, as couldn't come my Jaahn aneer
At leaping—thur 'is trap ee set.

Ee marked my Jaahn's best leap : gurt stones
Ee buried unner it by daark.
Nex' tiime my dearie juumped, ee give two groans,
That's aall, they sayed Th' daactor
says, "'is spiine !'
An' held my hand liike—when we'd stripped en
staark
Jaahn's thurrtty—never's give a siign !

PAST HORIZONS

MAARNIN' ! Yaan steeple ? Aye, he were built
When I were buildin' along o' him
My pride upon my first en, Jim.
A gurt big chap, as growed an' growed !

I watched en take th' Lunnon road
By six, one maarnin' in '65,
June twenty-faaur. That *were* a yeer—
Th' best hay yeer, as I'm alive !

Me an' my mates gived en a cheer.
On that ere spiire as piints to sky,
I watched en pass. He shouts, " Good-bye,
Faather ! " He stands an' shouts it up
To me a-workin' nigh th' top,
From him so clear-like down in road

Aye, you can see th' road fraam here,
On Maartyr's High So help me God !
I watched my first en *dis-ser-peer*.

A CASH TRADE CALVARY

GUS 'Ammond—'im that used ter buy
For Robins, Gray, an' 'Obb, but 'ad
Consumption, an' come down a bit
In life—said 'ow th' food was bad,
An' chucked up Sharp's becoz of it.
Then Joe Meach came an' 'ad a try.
An' what 'e stood from Fatty Sharp
Would 'ave made a hangel bust 'is 'arp!

Oh—an' a 'ill called Martyr's 'Igh
We'd go ter, early closin'! There
'E'd take 'is 'at off to th' air.
"Ah! Mister 'Ughes!" 'e'd say ter me,
"Life's very different *here*," 'e'd say,
"When I've my takin's wrong, or we
"Are open late o' Saturday!"

* * * * *
* * * * *

One Sunday, Joe, I 'ad 'is girl—
Up past th' woods. It was that fun!
I stuffed 'er mouth with clover flowers!
An' for two mortal blinkin' hours
We clean went mad there in th' sun!
O' Monday, I stood in th' shop
'Side Joe. She winked be'ind some bales
While Joe was tryin' ter make 'is sales
Come right. An', as per usual, Joe—
Th' silly blighter—was all wrong,
'Bout everythink an' me an' Flo!
Then sudden-like I saw 'im stop.
'E caught us lookin'—seemed ter know
'E was no good at anythink.

I saw 'er try another wink—
It was no good. Fair bloomin' cop!
I felt a rotter after that!
An' you'll berlieve me, but it seem
As I'd a touch of 'eav'nly grace!
For Jesus Christ without 'is 'at
Come all at once into th' shop—
An' there was Joe a-servin' 'im!
Joe with a 'at with but a *brim*—
An' stuck above 'is own red face!

THE STRANGE WOMAN

THE women used to sharp their tongues and call
their kids away
When her dark brows would lighten to watch them at
their play.
And she would lift her eyes a little : her gleaming
sinner's mouth
Would smile above the falling street towards woodlands
to the south,
Where the oak stands o'er the hazel and the aspen
screens are grey.

What has become of her, by now, who sinned there
in the grass ?
For many men as lovers, they said her fancy was.
A great bold lass, a fine lass . . . The woodman
has a tale :—
A woman with a face of fire who made the sunset pale
And left the brakes to westward, three years come
Michaelmas.

THE OLD MOTHER

THE becks that never sleep
They tell their measureless tale
To the darkness among the rocks
And the stars upon the fell,
Where the heather hides the fox
And a woman goes to weep.

In Flanders lies her son
Who watched the elvers dim
—It seems but yesteryear—
Come up to play with him
The fox has heed of her—
The stars and water none.

FERLIE HAUGHS

THE old man sees them, hears their word,
Who made the sunset and taught to swim
The water-vole, and the grey-green bird
To sing in the grey-green over him.
Ay, yon, he sees more things than seem
Upon the haughs, to the neighbour-folk ;
Who fleer his lass, and his mind—for smoke,
Saying : “ Her handfu’ o’ shame has blurred
His brain . . . though his een were afterward
Unco bright, gin ye looked in ’em ! ”

THE GOLD CUP

THE grey road sweats from long black wounds below
A crowd of flying wheels, that hiss and scream,
Or with the voice of some wild equinox,
Surge through the spells by which midsummer woods
Enhance their silences for public ways
As for life's hot high turnpike.

I have seen
The solar worlds turn in the lathe of time,
The great stars, that have gone behind the blue—
Those bright and awful engines, in the dark
Move round the mandrels of eternity ;
Have felt their silence and their motions mine.
These things have reached me so I deemed it God
Was drawing at my fibres : and the touch
Has made me holy with strange heat.

But here,
Speed was a daemon, and of closer kin :
His madness was one wrought for men that wive
With flesh and blood,—who fill the earth with noise,
And melt her veins to make steel chariots.
Yet here with something more akin to joy
Than to this lust for leaving trees behind,
(Though beauty haunt their boughs, and in their leaves
All day the grey wood-pigeon makes his song)
The daemon urged me onward, westward, through
The Bagshot sands—the bramble-odoured miles,
With all their serried glooms of pine, wherein
The death-wind of the burnished dragon-fly
Cools its hot wings in shadow. And I saw
In the June woodlands foxgloves watch the fern
Rise and grow dark with summer on the trees,

And elders whiten in the copse, and white
The high robins breathe their petals down—
Strayed sheep pick from the grasses ; the purple spires,
Whose chimes fall softly over Bracken Land
As do their slender shadows.

And by me flashed

Women, for whom the looms of all a world
Have woven to fix the rainbow and the skies
And colours that are born at evening,
At morning, or when noons about the earth
Lie strange in labour, starkly and aswoon.
I saw fat necks, and flowers, in backs of cars :
Fair faces like fair pastures of the soul
Where gentle thoughts grow that a spirit rears,
I saw go by ; and the dark face of greed,
Lit by its welcome for a day that has
The gambler's flame at heart not twenty miles
Away ; the drunkard's face, whose trembling fills
The swollen and stained ensigns of debauch ;
The glutton's, saying graces in the sun,
While yet asleep 'mid its own fleshy pillows ;
Faces of manhood suave and debonair.
This route of things swam in the stream of Speed
That filled the roads to flood : only the sun
And the shadows, his allegiant retinue,
In woods of soft-foot shade, it seemed, were slow . . .

And now the wheels were still, and put away.
Now well-fed flesh—that tastes a strong delight
In these high functions that keep life alive
For men and women, and make swift the soul
For its escape from dullness as the legs
Of horses for yon green course 'twixt the rails—
Propitiates the gambler's god ; or seeks

A Delphic voice among the newspapers',
That shall so move the legs on some one steed,
The soul that hearkens to the prophecy
Shall leave all weariness behind

“ They're running ! ”

The cries leave off. With all its eyes, the crowd
Watches the bay or chestnut, black or brown ;
Bright silks of variant hue There in the sun,
A slow lone swallow moves above the grass.
And gallop, gallop, gallop, goes the field—
Is gone again—now there along the pines

“ You've done the favourite ? ”

“ A certainty !

Eh ? Well then, more or less ! One has to plunge
In these days They've been out on strike
for weeks.

One must make money somehow ! Mrs. A
Will have two husbands after this week's fun,
If *this* gets beaten—or they wrong the dame.
They say she's gone the—”

“ Really ? ”

“ Damn it all,

She'll have to get it *somewhere* ! ”

“ Two, more or less—

What ! ”

“ Look here, Bobby, stow your more or less !
Be charitable, can't you ! ”

“ Here they are !
He’s *there* with ‘em !”

“ Thank God ! And going *well* !
He’s coming now ! Hooray ! The favourite’s
Won it—he’s won it *now* ! . . . Good God ! he’s
beat !
Damnation take the bloody brute ! I’m—”

Black,

For hosts of eyes, a painted number goes
Into the frames’ white glare—a gallows-thing
For thousands, whom it mocks at, while they see
A hangman at their hopes

And in the sun,
A slow lone swallow moves above the grass.

PRIZE-GIVINGS

FAR voices of the peep o' day
Come like a throng ;
The rustling poplars in the grey
To stealthy choirs belong—
Choirs that have heard
The daybreak-bird
Excels them with his song.

And whispering in all their leaves,
They breathe afar—
Competitors whom daybreak gives
For prize the morning star ;
Whose silver rings
Each leaf that swings
Where their tall shadows are.

The air on high is strange bestirred ;
The song in heaven
Falls through their leaves whose every word
Has silver echoes even—
An elfin crowd
That breathes aloud
While the chief prize is given.

AUTUMNAL

MISTFALL, damp leaves, and bracken still,
No wind, a wan sky saddening to grey,
And silence that inherits from the hill
Things alien, everlasting, far away,—

All these encompass me. As in a throng
Of rapt vague presence, I repeat alone
The litanies of elementary song
That rise from out my blood-beat's monotone.

A HIDDEN GARDEN

A winding water, under hills that are
Its age-long listeners, is in that land :
Voiced with their echoing woods, they reach afar,
Hill behind hill, soft-spoken as a band
Of pilgrims at a shrine, the Pan pipe calls.
Sometimes within the darks of their own leaves
A whispering stealth they hide
As though of fugitives :
Thronging the underwoods and hour, noon-tide
Comes through those hills, and then to silence falls.

A garden hidden there has made the sound,
The silence, one with flower-bright slopes at noon
That, as through magic rising from the ground,
Watch by the water-levels. And a swoon—
Such trance as sleeping shadows have—is thrown
On that earth-haunted zone of coloured air.
The sun lights dark yew trees
As though a god hid there
Was watching too, while spells worked, and release
Waited on gods long sculptured in their stone.

And there man's spirit, from its shapen clay,
Goes forth to seek its fashioners and find
A radiant parentage the middle day
Broods over with great eyes asleep and blind
With watching at the noon-tide of desire.
Desire fulfilled is there. And what fulfils
That dream is even as the flowers
For colour, and even as the hills
For hearkening when stream-spoken, and as the
hours
For thronging time with crowded flight and fire.

SEPTEMBER AT HIGH HEAD CASTLE

THE season to the forest ground
Makes answer—echoes that renew
The vanished ones of Inglewood ;
They rise with all their leaves around
And mighty yet in their foresthood—
Great oaks and ash trees like desires
For light and shade, or silent spires
Of thought dim-breathing in the dew.

O spirit moving as a sea
Below the moon's pale stress, and drawn
Throughout life's endless deeps ! O tide
Unseen and strong as gravity,—
Unseen as powers the planets hide
Deep in their hearts, that move the wheel
Of all the worlds,—could man but feel,
As earth, his year's fulfilment dawn !

The summer passes like a sign
Betwixt an earth and a sky less known
To man than to the forest fern,
The beck's hushed voice, the ancient line
Of that old wood whose branches turn
The sun-stream over rigg and slack,
The far twin fells of Saddleback
Which top Blencathra's bulk of stone.

ACROSS THE PLOUGH

THROUGH each furrow the midnight hours
Flow on 'neath the falling rays
In a starlight of solemn powers
Where only the gray owl answers such things as the
poplar says.

But the falling of rays was caught
By pale women as in a trance—
The mothers whose fearful doubt
Needs must follow the plough in France.

Through thorns of a hedgerow, that throng
Up the hill in their glooms and tear
Passing winds with as dark a song
When Wild Hunts of winter are round,
Came echoes of laughter—the sound
Crept over my feet from the ground
Like a snake from the hedge ; from the hedge—like
ghost-hands into my hair.

IN CAMP

I, and oaths, and my rough mates,
We fill the tent with noise,
A dozen of us, reprobates—
With finer, strange alloys
When the moon comes o'er the hill
And looks on our mystery
And the bugle bids us be
Asleep or lying still.

Then as twelve spokes within a wheel
We seem, with but one common goal
The empty helmets seem to reel
Round rifles hanging from the pole

On its back, upon the ground,
Our wheel of life lies there
The great wheel of the world goes round :
Reveille climbs the morning air.

THE WET CANTEEN

EYH! where's "Jack Cade" the sergeant gone
As came out of the Fusiliers?

A sod if ever there was one!

Oh, he went west at Armenteers

I've kep' his book . . . he's tried to write,

See—7 pints absen 1st parade

Gord bloody blimey, wot a sight!

Well, 'ere's good luck to Sergeant Cade.

A GUNNER

GUNNER, why stand ye in the moon,
While the evening hate goes by?
—me ! with umpteen shells an' one
For doings in the sky !

And we all see the gunner clear
In the world without an end,
With a brush what he scrounged off a bombardier
An' a tin o' Soldier's Friend.

“ TRENCH-LOOK ”

THREE dead men they look at me
From where they died in broken ground.
One, the big man of the three,
Still has eyes to stare and wound—
Big enough for three.

Both the others by his side
Sleep it seems because they died.
But the man who sits and stares—
All of sight the others had,
Sometimes when the light is bad,
Takes him unawares.

And that death should set men free,
Comes as no surprise—
Comes as no surprise *to me* ;
Though the big man of the three
Stares with all his eyes.

A SENTRY

TWO hours to watch the waves' long front emerge
Out of the darkness over the sea, and shine
Wan as a phantom moon in dreams where a phantom
surge
Breaks and spreads seething towards one, line by line.
Two hours to watch and to tramp the sand and to smell
the brine.

With many deaths stored cunningly close in the
magazine,
Ready to leap, at a touch, for a mile or more—
Watching awhile, at ease, how the bayonet keen
Severs the spindrift blowing across the shore—
Watching in starlight, cold as the steel to a world at war.

THE HONEST ARTIST

SAID HE :

My friend, monopolise
Me as you will—bind not my eyes,
For fear lest they some naiad should surprise.

AND FOR HER ANSWER,

it came pat :
Art drowns the kittens not the cat !
Are your eyes open after that ?

BINSEY HEAD

A TRAGEDY

SEEN from the dales, but lonesome, still, and high,—
On Binsey Head the winds with hue and cry
Throng a road-end, a planting. Down the fell
Beyond the firs, are two camp-circles old—
Hoarse with long bents, at times of windy cold,
Hoarse as from some rough tale they strive to tell.

The north looks on to them, and with a shout
Sometimes—when day breaks or when day goes out
Wildly on those dim mounds of windy grass.
Sometimes shrill voices come, the dales-folk say,
To keen above the place : and he is fey
Who meets them in the planting, when they pass.

Yet in the fosse dikes, where the heart's-ease shows
Its faint shy eyes and beauty, quiet goes—
Blows, as it were, for evermore. And men,
Who face the north across the fells, may creep
Warm 'twixt the ramparts as the mountain sheep—
Such changes of the air are wrought therein.

But he who lies there when the north is loud,
And after, mounts the ridges, he is bowed
Before a summons sharp as pain, that calls
Cold to his heart, and to his breathing, cold :
A young man's blood there in an hour grows old—
So swift the spells at work above the walls.

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Jim Andrews' lass lived out Seaturrock way,
On Thunder—fells south-eastward ; where the play
Of sunlight on Tarn Levin fills the slack*
With fire, and heather purples it, and sound
Comes through a rake† and mutters round and round
The whinstone—from the winds on Shadowback.

Men stared at her as though she were a fire
Starting among the mountains. Their desire
Took light at her, and glowing in their faces,
Made some more shamefast than she ever was—
Save with one only. Him she scarce would pass
Without a frown, or quickening of her paces.

And once this man had chanced to see her lie,
Himself unseen, (March it was ; when the sky
Northwards was one grey shouting) in the camp
Beyond the high fir planting. He had stared—
She knew not for *how* long had Reuben dared
To watch her, ere with sudden speech and tramp

Through the dry voices of the bents he came,
Calling her. For the girl had grown as flame
Before his eyes ; and often, from the fells
Above the slack that hid her home, he saw
Her red hair flicker in some passing flaw—
And day or night he saw how nothing else

Might so lead him from loneliness, and steer
So bright a course for him. Yet came she near,
Sometimes his voice grew dumb in him with strain
Of the unspoken words at work within
He durst not speak. This, lest they failed to win
Her ears, through one strait moment, when his brain

* A hollow. † A narrow way between hills.

Might shape his heart's speech into such a guise
A young lass might make welcome.—In her eyes,
His height and breadth bore witness to his ways—
A great man roughened by the windy fells
To something in their likeness ; with their spells
Of quiet on him sometimes, and their haze

Of mysteries and brooding. At times, he passed
Along the rigg† high up on Lochanwast,
Of evenings. And Jim Andrews' Alison
Would spy him, and go swiftly by the track
Within a cosp of rowans, up the slack ;
And where the lonning* left the trees, and one

Grey rock stood crowned with saplings, she would stare
Across a mile of wistful evening air,
And watch at Reuben, calling him by name
Softly. Or she would wonder how he throve
In house and fold and garth ; or why she strove
To flout him—when to flout him was a shame.

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There came that March-wild sunset : Binsey Head,
Among its crags and firs and grasses, led
Great harmonies ; whilst round a press of light
Retreating up the western rocks, the world
Her own slow shadow's closing onset curled.
When but the high rocks on the fell were bright,

* A lane or trackway. † A ridge.

There Reuben chanced to see her in shadow lie—
As one who lay and hearkened earth and sky
And watched, from out the snug dike's bottom grass,
The last rays o'er the summit burn. And he
Felt life strive in him, and eternity
Around—like one at bay within a pass.

“ Yung Elsie, but tha's best be gauin' haume !
Snauw's nun sau fur out yon ! ” For answer came
From Alison, the neb-plates of her clogs
Beating the grass behind her. Then she rose :
Her hair blew wild. And Reuben felt his foes
Wax terrible—and shouted to his dogs.

“ Eyh ! Snauw's out yon. Tha's gettin' on. Tha's
nigh
T' find th' weather out then, Reuben ! Eyh ?
Tha's a grand man, maebbe, t' find things out !
Th' nor' wind blaws sau chill this waey, I'm all
For saeyin' 'tis th' snauw. Maebbe 'twill fall
An' hush this wind as blauws my *hair* about ! ”

And a great gust took hold of her, and flung
Her against him ; the while her hair, that stung
His bitten face, went through it skin and bone—
Driving his brain above a pit. He groped
Through darkness at her head : his hand he roped
With one bright tress, and cried her for his own.

But the wind parted them ; and since her eyes
Were hidden, he had for answer to his cries :
“ If tha durst cum anigh me under yon,
(The planting) tha'll get nau more words o' me !
T' taeke a lass sau, Reuben, fie ! Maebbe
Tha taekes me for naut but a sheep ! Gau on !

“Nau follerin’ me, my lad!” And Reuben thrust
Due east along the firs, where every gust
Howled night upon him, and the brambles whined
Under the firs, of darkness and defeat.
But Alison, she crossed the wood; and bit
Her rough lips hard—the north had made unkind.

Her lips, maybe, would please no lad just then,
Wind-roughened so! And there was this with men—
They took dislikings easy. She would know
Such joy with Reuben, her kiss must so contrive
To reach his roots that memories might strive
In him like first flowers, after winter snow.

And the first kiss she gave him was to heal
Sharp words her lips had dealt him. Like a wheel
Within her head, his cry rushed round and round—
Her ears were loud with it: below the firs
In that last light, a roaring universe
Broke like a sea—and still she heard the sound.

That night, down in the slack, her ears could mark
His voice come over Thunder through the dark.
On Lochanwast a great wind searched the ridge,
Shouting all night: the rowan copse near by
Was full of voices: through it all a cry
Sprang—Reuben’s voice, and sharpened to an edge.

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In April, higher sunlight showed the year
A half-grown thing with voices over her
 In every covert and under every dome
The changing sky built up with lights and showers.
Through a long pause of wind-deserted hours
 The girl lay still, not far from Reuben's home.

The light was poured into a web of song
From heavens renewed : the fells rose strange and young
 In their green places : there she heard of things
Born without pain as none in human life ;
But most—a voice as though of Reuben's wife
 Singing, a song of triumph, through the Spring's.

Yet in that new embrace of earth and sky
The woman shared, her man came never nigh.
 She saw him once, and caught her breath : her hands
Gripped hard on earth—then felt its goodness break.
For Reuben let some lambing trouble take
 Him from her sight, among the lower lands.

And the may's breath lay wide about the thorn,
The cuckoo sent his voice around the tarn,
 Loudly the ewes ranged over Lochanwast,
Ere Reuben went on Thunder fells again—
Hid in a cloud. But as he walked, the rain
 Set up great bows nigh Binsey Head, and passed.

She took their lonning, that folk called Long Mire ;
Under wet rowans watched the ancient fire—
 Through the leaves' drip and song of birds, the broad
Arches of changing glory come and go ;
Then cried out quickly. Right within the bow
 Walked Reuben, like a god come from a cloud.

So seen, with glory all about him poised,
He had, for her, things that the Scriptures voiced.

She heard The Law—hushed, holy, full of change,
As when she stood on Sunday, and the rays
Looked in upon her with their solemn ways,
In Glenspot church. And Reuben, far and strange,

Clothed with the burning presence of the bow,
Laid hands upon her head, and bade her go
Through fire and water for him. Feeling this,
She felt God through the man, and through her sight
The living colours in her brain unite,—
Birds', becks', lambs', ewes', the whole earth's
ecstasies.

She saw him reach the quarry way, which led
From Thunder's high side on to Binsey Head,
Joining the road-end there, beside the fir.
"He wud be maekin' for Greenlatter, sure!"
(From Binsey Head there are three miles of moor
Slope westward. Grouse and buzzard hawks go there ;

There hag worms* lie in sun heat ; and the ground
Is a poor place will quake to carry hound,
Whole rods together, where a mile of moss
Lies darkly. Few folk go there Yet the
womb
Of elements seemed thereabouts ; the tomb
Of powers—for Reuben : so he went across.)

Then Alison, who saw the splendour pass
From off the fells, and but the heath and grass
Shining with common water drops, returned.
Down in the cottage, the bows were in her eyes
Still, and the God whose work in mortal guise
Walked in the rays. The room about her burned

* adders.

From rag-mat up to rafter, from wall to wall.
She sat, and shut her eyes, her hair let fall
Over her eyes—its quiet like a hood
Hung round her ; and the stone below her feet
Seemed not more still. Outside, first summer-heat
Began along the fells, and came and stood

Close, in the eavesdrip ; while among her hair
She sought to hold the vision, with its air
Rain-cooled and coloured as the irised wake
Of great dreams going. Then as in a trance
She felt herself withdrawn by circumstance,
Itself withdrawn as in an ancient brake.

As into some old thicket she had passed,
Outside the world. And Thunder, Lochanwast,
And Binsey Head, and far to the nor'west
Greenlatter rising and the moors between
With Reuben in their sunlight,—all were seen
Moving. But in the thicket there was rest.

Rest, deep with dreams, was there ; and still with thought
Life stood beside her, still as in a grot
Where no wind comes, though living air yet lays
Its lips to water, and of that quiet kiss
Green mosses have their life and mysteries
Of silent pasture—time's withdrawing-place.

There she was gone—remote, and a great while
As well as a great way, by broad fell mile
Or the broad May day judged—as women go
When love, with all his elemental air
Rayed, urgent, takes their senses by the hair
And kindles them as rain within the bow.

Outside, the becks' full choir in sunlight splashed
The rocks and stones with music. Levin flashed
Its burning waters at the sky. The trees
Spoke all together ere at last they grew,
Save for their drip, to silentness : a ewe
Searched somewhere in the hazels under these.

Yet still she mused, in respite from the thing
Turned swift now towards the summer from the spring—
The April time within her, that was done.
To hide awhile was all her need or care—
The vision yet awhile amid her hair—
Hide from a man far-walking in the sun.

The Life moved over her. She rose and stood :
The room filled with her hair and maidenhood
Flung wide in waking beauty and surprise.
“ He wud be maekin' for Greenlatter, sure ! ”
She spoke, the sunlight standing by the door.
But “ O God, give me him ! ” was in her eyes.

Then : “ Reuben lad, tha's taeken hauld my heart
This time, I'm thinkin' ! ” And with tricks of art
She held her wild hair staidly to her head.
“ Tha'll need nau more such handfulls t' tha fist.
Tha'll gripe me till tha's got me still an' kissed !
I willna want tha gaune till we be wed ! ”

Behind the heights north-westward, Reuben now
Stood by the beck that sings in Hunter's How
To wind-sown pines. The last warm breath of rain
Dried on the dark trees' drowsing heads above.
The place was lonely as the man in love.
The beck's voice wooed, then drove him on again.

A furlong, and a hunter's gate let through
A dry-wall there the heaven's farthest blue,
 Blinked with wet bars against the light. He bore
Straight for the gate ; and sought to shut away
The girl who in his footsteps night and day
 Was always and was never. On the moor

The sunlight burned, still, silent fire : the light
Seemed all that lived there ; till upon his right
 A whaup* went up and dropped slow cries. And once
A hag worm, a great adder, dark and long,
Slid from warm ground and crept with flashing tongue
 From man's sight and from heaven's and the sun's.

The sad bird crying, and the silent worm
Whose tongue moved as in menace, lent a form
 Of mockery to all his thoughts descried.
From out that light and heat there came forth less
Of joyous life than grafts of bitterness.
 But most his shadow mocked him by his side.

A power of ancient, spent, and baffled years—
Sun-lighted hopes blown out by windy fears
 Long, long ago ; and windy hopes that were,
Burnt out in that slow fire which from the skies
Still falls on dust that once had shining eyes,—
 A power of *thwarting* seemed to harbour there.

But most his shadow mocked him. Did she know
How once their shadows, mixed upon the snow,
 Had fleered the fellow of his after days ?
Beside the warm live man, on stone or grass,
The sun could give him for a mate, alas,
 But that thing, grey as whinstone in a haze.

* curlew.

“ Au eyh ! she wudna ha’ me, thaugh I’d dee
T’ gie her less than much o’ joy ! ” And he
Strode with shrewd strides among the quaking hags.*
“ Yon’s a grand plaece for such as lost th’ use
O’ livin’ ; wud laey a body out, an’ loose
Him down as sauft ! ” A buzzard from the crags

Sailed over, and from heaven watched the earth,
On preyful wings ; whose death-right was their birth
And old in nature when their natal scaurs †
That watched the morning and the evening light
Cross over, saw the Roman camps at night,
Or Druid altars, rear red misty stars.

Grouse hurried by across the lone man’s ken.
“ Ha’ dun wi’ suchlike bludy crack ! ” But when
Again the gorcock warned him with their cry
Go-back ! go-back ! thought settled in his face,
And watched the birds as though they were a race—
The prize, some favour ’twixt the earth and sky.

“ Nau ! nau ! She *wudna !* ” But he heard their talk
Grow far and cease, ere he began his walk
Again : for when he heard them shout at him,
He’d stood, and wiped the sweat from out his frown.
His clothes, rain-heavy, steamed against the sun :
But older mists had made his eyes to dim.

Through the inundant wave of that full time
When summer, spreading, mantles clime by clime
Up the fell pikes and warms the highest ground,
The man’s thought and the woman’s strove to reach—
Strove through a fateful distance, each to each :
The shining miles but mocked them—they were
drowned.

† craggy cliffs. * hummocky places of peat and ling, here boggy.

Then Reuben, adding to his fate, went on ;
And from Greenlatter, saw the moorland shone
 With all the powers of noonday—yet withal
Dull-featured as the doubt that dogged him thence :
The undersky would want its elements—
 Peace would not grace his homeward evenfall.

Nay ! on the moor the hags would gloom and grow
Long-shadowed, when the light was getting low,
 Without their native semblances of sleep.
And from the rising to the morning moon
The owls, that heard their sudden voices swoon
 Far out on starry opens, now would sweep

Greenlatter's and the firs of Binsey Head
With less of quiet on their wings than dread.
 Nor night, nor day, would people Lochanwast
With its familiar presences by fold
Or tarn or rigg or rooftree—with her old
 Splendours, earth would not when the rains were
 passed.

And turning from his errand of the kine
That brought him there, he saw the silver line
 Of Solway ; and upon the Scottish shore,
Criffell throw off his rains ; and great hills stand
Deep in blue light upon Northumberland.
 And all things far seemed now to need him more.

Then on the distances of norland raised
To meet the faint fair sky, for him were phased
 Wide calms, where no fears lurked from fell to fell
Larger than black-faced sheep, and no hopes loomed
Beyond their natural heights, and no man doomed
 His days and nights to doubtful tracts of hell.

Thus the unquiet in him urged his feet
To change horizons, while yet his pulses beat
From the hot climb across the fell. And soon
His purpose trod upon his thoughts of love—
Felt that rough trackway with its larks above
Through the broad-glowing hours of afternoon.

And in the evening through the seventh hour,
From English Street he gazed at Stanwix tower ;
Or heard the Carlisle newsboys wide and far ;
Or marked the many signs that England made
From bills that decked the city's light and shade—
That bade the Border folk take up the war.

Later, the trains passed loud across the dark :
Long hours he heard them—as he lay would mark
Their sound come out of Scotland, to the south
Shrink—and would wonder on what human load
Of fighting men was hasting by a road
That led to war's red daybreak. In his mouth

The name of war had tasted strange, a word
Not of his own—though since last August, heard
By night and day along the fells—but one
Men spoke of as 'twere word of Germany's.
And Wat, his bow-legged help from out Dumfries,
Had named a red polled Angus bull, *The Hun*.

* * * * *

At dawn a dream enlisted him. The thought
Stood high in him as in the azure fraught
With gold of noon the sun stood high. Then he
Had taken oath ; and written Wat, to bide
Close on the farm—"I'm for the wars." The tide
Of Eden river slipping to the sea

Seemed like his life—grown calm now ; the unrest
Of its headwaters in the high fells' breast
Left far behind, as he had left his own
Outpourings where the blae-girt crags, and cloud
Close-fitted to the mountains like a mood,
Had made his secret theirs, and theirs alone.

But soon he left the Eden for the pines
Of southern commons, and the tented lines
Where men lose touch with dreams—but learn to stand
Or move as one man, hours by hours, and think
But as some one man wills them, though on the brink
Of life. Three months he sweated in the sand,

Months harsh with grit that rubbed his mind away
From the high places where old starlights play
On far-viewed peaks of memory—memories
Of mountain waters where his love was given ;
Of nights whose dark and silent sides were riven
By the white fall anigh Seaturrock screes.

Still through his homeward-looking hours it came,
That faint old scar of water ; as a flame
Pushed through the nature of still, teeming, night
Peopled by hill-shapes and by silences
Akin to them ; sometimes a scar grown less,
At times flushed forth, at times grown large and white.

Still within earshot of his mind, by hours,
Sometimes, a voice of all the becks and powers
Of water harboured in the hills enquired
Anew throughout his soul. The answer led
Through windy twilights over Binsey Head—
Far out on Thunder fells retired, retired.

One thing alone was clear—if lacking joy :
Duty he turned to for his soul's employ
The first sea voyage of his life had passed.
Strange folk in a flat land had welcomed him.
And one old woman, when the day was dim
In poplar spires, had spread her hands and cast

Some unknown blessing on him through a mist
Of dust ; one, later, caught him by the wrist,
From out a wet wild coppice, crying—" Kill !
Kill ! Kill ze Boches !" ; and one had claimed a franc
For three small apples gathered from a bank
And nettled ditch nigh orchards on a hill.

* * * * *

And now he lived to crawl about a wood,
While death searched all that tortured neighbourhood—
Tearing the trees, and limbs from men. It came
And burst men open at a stroke : the sound
Of death passed through the reeking air and ground
While Reuben and his fellows put a name

To death : with joking words each separate form
They heralded ; and met him storm by storm
With laughing oaths. With oaths that were their last,
Some held their flesh together for a space
And looked men near them fairly in the face
The while they died : some, screaming, splashed and
passed

Backwards and forwards through their own blood : and
some

Broke into childish talk of friends and home :
Some yelled the name of Christ : some, raving mad,
Made noises of the ape : some did but die,
And looked a great way up into the sky
With eyes that nothing living ever had.

For days the broken lights from sun and cloud
Passed through the wood whose shadows were a shroud
For mortal agonies. The blasted leaves
Whirled from the shell-burst, and the leaves that fell
To autumn's quiet ; shapes impalpable
That harboured there awhile like fugitives

Or took the light a moment and were gone
Into their caves of ether—all that shone
In eyes that dared not sleep against the day
Though the stretched brain behind them dreamed in air
Three paces beyond their place of vigil there :—
All these were watched by Reuben where he lay.

For now the laughing oath, the cunning smile
Had left him there with death and these awhile.
And now a cloud came on his brain—his soul
Now went as softly wide across the wood
To watch him from a German's eyes, who stood
Without his brains and clutched a young larch pole.

Wonder would come—that so great foolishness
As war found hearing yet on earth. A press
Of angers now would crowd him nerve by nerve.
Disgusts that ate him up ; self-hates that ran
Filching all pride in him as fighting-man,
These visited the trench that, curve on curve,

Went through the wood : they found him out and said,
Through all the deafness gathered round his head,
“ Glory ! ” and “ Honour ! ”—till his brain was full
Of mumbled words as meaningless as “ time ”
To a young lover watching blushes climb
Upon young cheeks. The echoes in his skull

Seemed not so hard to bear or put away
As were the prickings felt throughout a day
Cloud-wearied, with an autumn weariness,
Deep in his tortured spirit. For in the fires
Of man's long martyrdom, the twisted wires
Before his eyes still seemed to writhe ; a mess,

Hung on them—red and seared, without a face,
That had been man—still seemed to throb. The place
Where Christ the crucified was put to hang
Had not more dreadful trees nor darkened air
Than in this wood all day showed sinister,
Nor sharper cries when soul from body sprang.

He thought of those soft rainfalls of the fells.
Loved or unloved, he wanted nothing else—
Like grace they seemed, so quiet, veils wherethrough
God showed the hills at peace to men. To find
Himself by Binsey Head, the evening wind
Voicing the wet fir planting on the brow !

And now his mind veered strangely : there were tears
Thick in his eyes : now hardly in his ears

The gun-fire shook him from his dreams. " Fall back !
You there ! " It missed him, where he lay alone
And heard her caulkers strike a lonning stone,
And her voice calling chickens through the slack.

And now his yearning, only, seemed alive—
For her, and for her womanhood to thrive

His soul at end of war-farings ; for arms
To clasp him with a woman's clasp and fill
His life with unknown tenderness, some still
And holy evening 'mid the fellside farms.

Now she would pity, could she see him so
In that foul place of death, crying and low
With weariness . . . That moment all the
wood

Roared, burst in flame. He rose to meet his bride,
His red hands working at his own inside
In frantic ways and filling with his blood.

His face shrank small and thin : the fires of pain
Leapt in his eyes, a shadow in his brain
Fell thud by thud. Six paces he had breath,
The seventh and his day closed on the earth.
The chill soil smoked awhile, before the birth
Of that night's dew and stars shone on his death.

* * * *
* * * *
* * * *

Wat told how Reuben, to a sale of neat
Beyond Greenlatter, had gone : the sudden heat
Had caught him on the fells and loosed him mad.
He needs must off to Carlisle, and enlist.
Had written that there were monies in the kist
Beside the bed enough to pay his lad

Six months of wages. And for the farm, he wrote,
The lawyer man at Cockermouth had note

To treat with Wat as master : this much said—
In Glenspot's "Crown"—called for a gill of ale.
Blacksmith spoke up : "Au eyh : I mind th' saele."
Landlord, he took the florin, dropped his head,

And stared across his stomach. "Eyh ! his luck
A' roond, Joe," went on Wat. The tap was struck,
And made their echoes while they drank and stared.
But Wat, a dourly close man with his crack,
Refilled his pipe and shoved the dottle back,
Lit up, then out he walked with shoulders squared.

When he had left Glenspot's last house behind,
To the broad day he told his inner mind.

"Yon gerrl o' Andrews' is in't, red hair an' a' !
A genty gerrl, nae doot as grupped him sair."
Wat turned his head, spat high into the air.

"Yon gerrl o' Andrews' has drauve oor mon awa' !

She heard it while her father supped his tea.

Jim Andrews, with a hand upon his knee,
Sat in the cool the evening rowans made.

"Elsa, yon graete lad Reuben's for th' war !
Th' auld man at Th' Crown was in th' bar "

(She hurt her light-shod foot upon the spade,

And grabbed a root, and peered about the ground,
And wondered if her father heard the sound

Her strange voice made in answer) " when his Wat
Cums in an' tells 'em all t' drink his luck.
Saeys Reuben was t' th' saele, when he were struck
Daft, gauin' along, wi' th' sudden heat! Glenspot

" Were all acrack wi' *Wat's left master now.*
Twelve munths o' wages advancit, an' a do
O' lawyers t' help wi' more! Daft's nau mistaeke!"
Then she: " Naey, father, Reuben's maebbe mad
Wi' hearin' how his cusin's lost her lad,
Yung Auwen." Ere she found a berry cake

Upon the parlour table, she had reeled.
The room was grown into a misty field
For size: and 'twixt her throbbing heart and mind
Her hands were vague of purpose. Cold as stone
The plate felt, found, but in her hands was grown
A guide to reach her father. She stood behind,

The while he ate and talked. The rowan stirred
Faintly above her, and in their leaves she heard
A sigh, and past their leaves, the deep blue dome
Of heaven keep silent. And then before her eyes
The evenlight took on her passion's guise:
Now must she dwell in longing, as her home.

And half that night she, kneeling by her bed,
Prayed passion's prayers. The owls on Binsey Head
Seemed trying to hoot her from her trust in God:
She did but pray the harder. In her sleep
She felt an angel with a man's mouth creep
Between her breasts, answer her womanhood.

* * * *
* * * *

That summer her every day rose to the crown
Of hopes and fears : her every lying down
Was with a prayer for Reuben. Suns and rains
Dwelt over Thunder : on the fells afar
Night rose to change its beacons star by star.
And Alison would watch against the Wain's

Bright splendid coming on the roads of God—
The silent ways of heaven her prayers had trod ;
Would watch the worlds outside our own keep on
Their so remote unquestionable ways
Of bright and calm. By day the girl would raise
The kiss-me* from the grass, bid every one

Bring ease into her heart. Her wanderings
Were all for Binsey Head, and by the springs
Of many becks which in that fell have flow,—
Through pines and birches in a ghil, beneath,
That, deep with blaes and different coloured heath,
Adds its own voice to that in Hunter's How.

And after many days, her face on fire,
She wrote to Reuben,—hid her young desire
In common words old friends might pen, and such
As not a stranger's eyes could scan awrong ;
Nothing of all her prayers and tears and song—
But Binsey Head she wrote of overmuch.

* wild heartsease or pansy.

No answer came : the letter missed its man.
'Twißt doubt and doubt her flurries bade her scan
The daily lists of death and wounds. The year
Dwelt in the rowans, faint with yellow gold,
Calm dying. Then, near to Seaturrock fold,
She saw Wat shepherding. He called to her.

" *Missing.*" The Scotchman broke her fall to ground ;
Without unkindness grimly coaxed her round ;
As slyly watched her feet strive by his side
O'er the rough part of Thunder fells. Then he
Made off, with shoutings to the dogs. And she
Crept to the tarn. Her grey eyes when she cried

Welled green and darkness o'er their rims of blue :
Her face with change and darkness showing through
Was eloquent of nightfalls where nor stars
Would share her vigils, nor dreams delight her sleep ;
But like to death, her guilt would haunt and creep
In its own shadow always. For the wars

Had hardly taken Reuben—he was one
Who held that wars were but a justice done
On folk who crowned their folly into kings—
Her wantonness had sent him forth to die.
Was never day now but from sky to sky
The morning light would pass to evening's

With signs for her of punishment. If dull,
Next dawn had been a daybreak merciful—
But like a flush of triumph morning came,
Driving the dark : her anguish in that fire
Fell from her soul, that high and high and higher
Swept Lochanwast with wings of hope aflame.

And for a month she trusted hope : the news
Would come to-morrow. She saw the rowans lose
Their last leaves, and the wan blue daisies hide
Their eyes' last gold against the winter death ;
That with long moans amid its freezing breath
Came on the fells and made the countryside

Of plantings and of dry-walls hoarse and shrill,
And sharp with hosts of windy spears, that fill
Each ridge as with thick foemen. And a threat
Was round about her day and night, a fear
That hope was false—a traitor coming near
To cast her down when once she was beset.

* * * *

* * * *

From Binsey Head's loud shade of firry glooms,
She spied the swift clouds grow—the icy wombs
Of cold and snow and sleety rain. Their swarms
Rose in the north, with doubt's insistence throve
All day to monstrous size—a yellow drove
Of shapeless lights among their darker storms.

There in the trees she lingered to the dusk.
She heard his voice. Around, the dropping husk
Of cones and bark, and dead wood falling light
On the first snow,—she heard that last of him
Again, as when they parted there. The dim
Wood's echoes seemed a concourse vast as night

That gathered there to mock her. To the house
The fierce winds of that evening brought the boughs'
Wild waesome clamour, while she sat and heard
His voice among them breaking into cries
That broke her heart—the pain rose in her eyes
Each time the peats before her sparked and stirred.

She had not slept an hour, when through her sleep
She heard his voice again—far out and deep
In roaring places of the night. She crept
From out her bed. Cold clutched her. With wild hands
She dressed, and shawled her head and bosom. Bands
Of howling things that over Thunder swept

Entered the porch ; the rowans had a noise
Of terror ; and a snow-wraith kept its poise
A whirling moment before the open door,
Sprang, vanished on the night. The door she shut.
A dozen yards, the teeming dark had put
Its wildest white upon her ; in a score,

Her home had passed from out its place. The squalls
Shook out their blinding burdens : flying walls
Of snow rushed by her. To the rowan's cry
Of terror she groped her way ; and underneath
Their ghastly noise she paused and got her breath,
And found the lonning through them, by-and-by.

She reached the rock—where once she saw him go,
That day of glories when the burning bow
Revealed her love to her through eyes and heart.
In the rock's lee she shrank, while on its crown
The saplings whistled, going up and down
With every gust. If she should fail her part,

He might be gone for ever ! Then she steered
Straight for the planting on the Head ; and neared
That wood in uproar,—twice and lost it twice :
The snow's confusion of the air was such,
The very night seemed turning round to clutch
The flying drifts. Through snow and darkness,
thrice

She struggled, panting, for her goal. A cloud
Of finer snow came on the place ; and loud
Above the wind the wood's dark tumult came.
She gasped for breath and triumph, reached the trees,
Plunged through their ghosts . . . Her hot ears
seemed to freeze.

Yung Elsie, but tha's best be gain' haume !

Then she cried out—great cries : “ This wae ! this
wae !

Nau lad ! dear lad ! I'll seek tha till th' daey ! ”

The branches whipped her face among the wilds
Of brambles, briers, clutching her. She strove
With fiends, and beat them, in that dreadful grove.
Her eyes were bright as fever in a child's.

She burst her way across the wood : the firs
Writhed now and roared behind her ; but her ears
Were strained now northward through that driving
place

Of wind and snow and night and storming air.
The whirling drift rose to her sodden hair :

She thrust it from her ; sprang as for a race

Across the open, shouting all she yearned,
Nor e'er turned back—only her voice returned,
Once, twice. Then, faintly, from far out, her cry
Of "Reuben!" drifted in upon the snow
Where the wild trees in ghost-like row by row
Swayed, shrieked, roared, closed in battle with the sky.

And for three hours they battled—till the wood
Was misty strife. After, they seemed to brood,
When strife was done and all the winds lay dead.
And very quietly the snow crept on
From bough to bough, and made all things at one
With silence, worlds-deep over Binsey Head.





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